

Invasive species program

Exotic plants are those that have been introduced, either intentionally or by accident, into areas outside their native range. Exotic plant species often out-compete native species because they are aggressive in their growth habits, produce more seeds that last longer in the soil, or have no natural predators or diseases in the ecosystem that they are invading. Some of these exotic plant species can severely affect the natural resources of the parks. The division's long-range goal is to control and/or eliminate those exotic species that present the greatest threats to the native flora.

During the summer of 1999, the division authorized the first inventory of exotic plants throughout the state parks system. This survey documented the presence and extent of invasive exotics in every park unit. The degree of infestation and difficulty of control are widely variable, and the Natural Resources Program has begun developing park-specific control plans. Under these plans, each park's invasive species are prioritized and species-specific control and monitoring protocols are developed. The Natural Resources Program has also developed invasive species workshops that are conducted across the system.

To address this problem, the division has produced exotic plant guidelines to provide technical information for the successful control of invasive exotic plant species. These guidelines cover the control of 14 common invasive, exotic plant species currently found in the parks, a method to set priorities for control and a method to assess and document control efforts.

Since the guidelines were written in 1998 we now know that there are far more invasive exotics in our parks and more arrive all the time. Moreover, invasive animal species such as those that attack our forest trees pose an even greater threat than some of the plants. In fact, behind habitat loss, invasive species are the second leading cause of the loss of biodiversity world-wide. In order to address this burgeoning issue the division recently added a position to the natural resources program to focus specifically on invasives of all kinds.